

This prayer service is best used at the end of the book *The Old Testament: Our Call to Faith and Justice*

**Prayer Service:
“An Offering of Thanks for the Semester”**

Teacher Notes

Ideally, during the ritual the students would be able to burn their “thank offerings.” If your school offers no ability for doing this safely or lawfully, these slips of paper could be placed in a box that could be sealed and kept in a special place.

Needs:

- a decorated prayer table with the Bible
- Assign the readings in advance so readers can mark their Bibles.
- a small slip of paper for each student
- a container for safe burning of these small papers and a candle (*or a box in which to place the papers*)
- soft music to be used during the ritual

Prayer Introduction

As we gather at the end of this semester, we thank God for our time together. We bring all of our experiences in gratitude back to God, using Psalm 66 as our prayer. For Israel, Psalm 66 wasn't simply a *remembering* of the God's redemptive acts in the past but also a *reliving* of these acts. The crossing of the Red Sea, finalizing the Hebrew exodus from Egypt, and the crossing of the Jordan River, beginning their stay in the Promised Land, were the greatest events of their history. To relive the times God led them to glorious victories such as these made real God's power to save them from even the most difficult challenges. Psalms of thanksgiving, such as this one, praise God for his specific actions during times of distress. Today we, too, thank God for help in the tough times of this past year, for the ways God has walked with us in good times, and for God's promise to remain with us forever.

Prayerful Reading: Psalm 66

Leader: We recall God's wonderful works during this semester. We call on God today to be with us as we give thanks and praise. After each reading, the response to the petition will be, “We thank you, God.”

Reader 1: Psalm 66:1-7.

Leader: Just as Israel refused to forget the basic actions of their history, we cannot forget to thank God for or take for granted the blessings we have received in attending this school. For our families, who have given us the opportunity to come to school here; for our teachers, friends, classmates—all of us who filled the pages of history for this semester--we proclaim:

All: We thank you, God.

Reader 2: Psalm 66:8-9.

Leader: We also recall God's protection during this semester. We thank God for our safety inside and outside the walls of our school, and we give thanks for those who work to keep us safe, and so we proclaim:

All: We thank you, God.

Reader 3: Psalm 66:10-12.

Leader: We remember the trials we each have faced during this semester: the trial of understanding what teachers were expecting of us, the trial of lost friendships, the trials of building class unity and school spirit... Yet, just as Israel was brought to the promised land after their trials, we also know that trials have made us stronger and brought us closer to God, and so we proclaim:

All: We thank you, God.

Reader 4: Psalm 66:13-15.

Leader: On our journey of this semester, each of us encountered his or her own difficulties. Perhaps during those times, we called out to God for help. Sometimes, in the face of sickness or trouble, we make promises to God like this one: "God, if you heal my mom, I promise I'll go to church more often." Psalms of thanksgiving are not just word offerings; they are "thank offerings." An individual would go to the temple, declare what God had done, and present a thank offering to God. Today we will follow the example of the Hebrews in the Temple. During this period of silent reflection, consider some specific action God accomplished for you this semester. Also, recall any promises you made to God. On the slip of paper, write the promise, or another offering of thanks. These will not be read by anyone. You will then be told what to do next.

Allow a brief period of reflection. Soft instrumental music could be played at this time.

Leader: At this time come forward one at a time to this bowl and candle. When you arrive, please say aloud something from this semester that you wish to thank God for. As Israel made their burnt offerings to God, you will light the paper containing the promises you made to God and put it into this bowl [*or place the paper inside this offering box.*] This act is your pledge to fulfill these promises to God.

More instrumental music could be played as they come forward.

Closing Prayer:

Reader 6: Psalm 66: 16-20.